Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements

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Abstract: Racism, sexism, and other forms of injustice are more than just bad attitudes; after all, such injustice involves unfair distributions of goods and resources. But attitudes play a role. How central is that role? Tommie Shelby, among others, argues that racism is an ideology and takes a cognitivist approach suggesting that ideologies consist in false beliefs that arise out of and serve pernicious social conditions. In this paper I argue that racism is better understood as a set of practices, attitudes, social meanings, and material conditions, that systematically reinforce one another. Attitudes play a role, but even the cognitive/affective component of ideologies should include culturally shared habits of mind and action. These habits of mind distort, obscure, and occlude important facts about subordinated groups and result in a failure to recognize their interests. How do we disrupt such practices to achieve greater justice? I argue that this is sometimes, but not always, best achieved by argument or challenging false beliefs, so social movements legitimately seek other means.

1 What Is Racism?

When we ask, "What is racism?" what sort of answer are we looking for? And where should we begin? We might consider:

(a) What are the beliefs/attitudes in virtue of which someone counts as a racist (Belief that Latino(a)s are lazy or that Arabs are terrorists.)

(b) What are the institutions, laws, and social structures that impose unfair burdens on certain racial groups (voter suppression laws; redlining)?

(c) What is the (broadly speaking) moral wrong in racial injustice (racial bigotry or hatred; structural injustice)?

All of (a–c) are interesting and important questions. But there is a further question that does not focus on the normative issues, (i.e., the sites or sources of racism's wrong), but on empirical questions about the nature of racism as a social phenomenon:

(d) What best *explains* the existence and persistence of racial inequality, racial injustice, racial wrongs?

Racism is typically taken to play this explanatory role: racism explains persistent racial inequality.[1] It may also, depending on your view, explain what makes the racial inequality morally wrong. The explanatory question (d) is at least equally fundamental as the normative question in determining what racism is, for as Tommie Shelby (2014) notes:

> [T]here is a distinctive social phenomenon that we are interested in, one with a long and tragic history that continues to this day. Suppose, for purposes of moral criticism, that we wanted to put the phenomenon of racism into some familiar category of recognized wrongs, such as intolerance for legitimate differences. We could not do so properly if we failed to grasp the nature of the phenomenon at issue, if, for example, we were wrongly to assume that it is a response to cultural differences between racially defined groups. Social scientific research will therefore be essential to ensuring that our moral assessments are suitably informed by the relevant facts. (2014, 63)

Shelby goes on to invite philosophers (and others) to take up the role of the social critic. This involves, on his view, careful attention to common sense, popular opinion, social science research, and normative theory, "to shed light on the most fundamental conceptual and normative issues that race-related questions raise" (2014, 63). In this paper I embrace this invitation and, more specifically, seek to understand the social phenomenon of racism: what it is and how it works, as a precursor to the normative questions raised in (a–c).

Starting with the explanatory question, Shelby (2014) argues that we should understand racism as a "fundamentally a type of ideology." He suggests, "*Racism is a set of misleading beliefs and implicit attitudes about 'races' or race relations whose wide currency serves a hegemonic social function*" (66; his italics). And, in keeping with his earlier (2003) paper, he continues: "*An ideology is a widely held set of loosely associated beliefs*

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[1] I follow Shelby, at least for the purposes of this discussion, in assuming that racism is invoked to explain durable racial injustice, and to do so in a way that illuminates normatively salient features of the phenomenon. I take it that racism, then, is an answer to (d), but in order for that answer to be illuminating we need to say more about what racism is. I will argue that racism is a particular kind of social system that instantiates and produces racial injustice. Another approach is to see racism not as *the* answer to (d) but as *part* of the answer that, together with other factors, produces racial injustice. We would still need to figure out what racism is, but it is not a condition on an adequate account that it answer (d). Shelby and I may be making different assumptions about the explanatory project that invokes the notion of racism. If so, then what I sometimes cast as a substantive disagreement about racism in what follows will turn out to be a difference in what question(s) we take the notion of *racism* to answer. Thanks to Alex Madva for pointing this out to me.

and implicit judgments that misrepresent significant social realities and that function, through this distortion, to bring about or perpetuate unjust social relations" (2014, 66; his italics).

On this model, there are two sources for ideology critique: epistemic and moral. The epistemic critique of ideology reveals its distortion and misrepresentation of the facts. The (broadly speaking) moral critique concerns the unjust conditions that such illusions and distortions enable. The specific form of moral criticism he has in mind is social/political:

> [R]acism should, first and foremost, be understood as a problem of social injustice, where matters of basic liberty, the allocation of vital resources, access to educational and employment opportunities, and the rule of law are at stake. (2014, 71)

Shelby's preferred framework of social/political assessment is Rawlsian (2014, 71).

Note that there are several important features of Shelby's approach to ideology: it is *cognitivist, functionalist,* and *pejorative* (Geuss 1981, ch. 1, esp. 13–22). It is *cognitivist* because it takes ideology to consist in "beliefs and implicit judgments," and patterns of reasoning. I take it to be characteristic of cognitivist accounts, in the sense intended, that ideologies are propositional and epistemic critique questions whether the propositions believed are justified, and whether the inferences drawn on their basis are sound.[2] It is *functionalist* because a set of beliefs and implicit judgments constitutes an ideology by virtue of their function. And it is *pejorative* because the ideology, by definition, misguides us; it distorts reality and produces or supports injustice.

I am sympathetic to Shelby's view that racism is ideological, and to both the functionalist and pejorative features of his account. My focus in this paper is the cognitivist dimension. I will argue that in order for a conception of ideology, in particular racist ideology, to do the explanatory work we ask of it, it needs to be less cognitivist, and as a result, we need to rethink the epistemic dimension of ideology critique. I will also argue that although racism is *ideological*, strictly speaking we should understand it as an ideological formation rather than an ideology *tout court*. The difference, I hope, will become clearer as we proceed. I select Shelby as an exemplar of the cognitivist approach, although I am aware that his view allows for

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[2] Whether Shelby would accept this narrowly epistemic version of critique is unclear. In considering the kind of cognitive defect he has in mind, he says that "a form of social consciousness may be ideological in ways that are not fully or accurately conveyed by simply calling the set of beliefs 'false.' This is part of the rationale behind using the vague term "cognitive defect" to refer to the negative epistemic characteristics of ideologies" (2003, 166). On my interpretation of the cognitivist view (whether or not it is Shelby's view), the cognitive defects in question involve holding beliefs without warrant (including a failure to update in light of new evidence), and various inferential errors, such as hasty generalization, equivocation, false dichotomy and others Shelby mentions.

alternative interpretations. My target is a certain familiar, though I think problematic, approach to social cognition that a further articulation of Shelby's more subtle approach to ideology may, in fact, avoid.

2 Ideology Critique: Challenges

I take the project of critical social theory (and so the role of the social critic) to be situated, and deeply political. The critical social theorist is not a neutral third party in disputes over justice, but is committed to a particular social movement, at a particular time, and seeks to provide resources for that movement (Haslanger 2012, 22–30; Young 1990, 5–8). In the current context, my commitment is to the movement to end racism and other interlocking forms of oppression with a focus on the early 21st-century United States. The task of explaining racial inequality is linked with the goal of ending it, and so involves critique. We've seen that one proposed explanation of persisting racial injustice is ideology. The cognitivist suggests, more specifically, that the source of the problem is "a widely held set of loosely associated beliefs and implicit judgments that misrepresent significant social realities." If this is right, then the proper target of ideology critique should be these beliefs and implicit judgments.

In undertaking ideology critique, there are two challenges: one normative and the other broadly epistemic.

- *Normative challenge:* in debates with another who fundamentally disagrees on moral/political issues, one's moral criticism can draw on one's own moral/political framework, in which case it is not likely to be convincing, or one can draw on the other's moral/political framework, in which case it is unlikely to recommend the changes one hopes for. How does ideology critique, then, manage to convince anyone or change anything?
- *Epistemic challenge:* to unmask the illusions of those who endorse a hegemonic understanding of reality one cannot simply point to "the facts," because hegemony functions to constitute the facts that (appear to) render it legitimate. As MacKinnon says, "the more inequality is pervasive, the more it is simply 'there.' And the more real it looks, the more it looks like the truth" (MacKinnon 1989, 101). So "successful" ideology isn't always false. (This is, in fact, how we often end up forming the "ideological" beliefs in question—we look around us. Though this must be qualified, of course. (See Haslanger 2012, ch.17.) For example, the majority of caregivers (of the young, disabled, and elderly) are women; the majority of the poor can't afford childcare, depend on public transportation, and often hold more than one job. Such patterns seem to justify further decisions regarding caregiving and deadline-sensitive professional work. But if one's own approach is not supported by "the facts" then what does support it? Wishful thinking?

In response to these challenges, Shelby takes what I'll call "the high road." In short, scientific and philosophical inquiry provide us with the resources to cut through the controversy (2003, 168–169). Rawlsian liberalism tells us that the impact of racist ideology is unjust (2014, 71). Science challenges the empirical content of the ideology: it tells us that there is no such thing as "race," and that laziness and promiscuity are not differentially distributed across populations by "race." Philosophy undermines the normatively problematic content, for example it refutes the idea that racial groups are inferior to others. Drawing on these epistemic and moral resources, racist ideology is exposed and delegitimated.

Within certain activist traditions, this sort of approach might be criticized as elitist. The complaint is that the theorist, relying on fancy training and purporting to occupy a privileged objective standpoint, just swoops in and tells the ignorant masses what they ought to believe. Supposedly, if they follow his instructions, then their problems will disappear and the world will be just. To be more specific and less rhetorically aggressive, one way of understanding the concern is that the approach in question is not politically helpful. Racists are not going to be convinced to dismantle White supremacy by the latest biological theory or the most compelling Rawlsian argument. But even if we aim for a more modest result, it is not even clear how teaching people the biology of race and a liberal theory of justice will dislodge implicit bias.

This criticism, however, is not fair to Shelby. *Of course,* people don't change their beliefs, especially ones that serve their interests, by being lectured at. The purpose of critical theory is simply to identify an ideology's cognitive failings:

> In a word, ideologies perform their social operations by way of illusion and misrepresentation. What this means practically is that were the cognitive failings of an ideology to become widely recognized and acknowledged, the relations of domination and exploitation that it serves to reinforce would, other things being equal, become less stable and perhaps even amenable to reform. (Shelby 2003, 174)

Shelby goes on to list a variety of factors that may prevent an ideology's cognitive failings from being recognized and the social changes from being implemented: economic conditions, dominant class control over the media, the organizational coherence and power of the movement, etc. (2003, 174–175). We should also add to this that in time we may learn from cognitive science how to change entrenched beliefs more effectively, and activists can draw on such methods as well.[3] The theorist cannot ensure that the movement will be successful, for success depends on contingencies of history that the theorist cannot control (nor can anyone else!).

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[3] Thanks to Alex Madva for this point. I remain pessimistic, however, that these better methods will be purely cognitivist in the sense of arguing people out of their false beliefs.

However, a second concern about the "high road" approach is that the theorist's perspective is *not* actually privileged, and, possibly further, the form of reason/rationality that purports to yield objective truths about our social condition is itself defective or limited in some way. This concern can be rearticulated in terms of the two challenges mentioned above.

- Regarding the normative challenge, the Rawlsian (or other moral) theorist seems to be just adding a further normative framework in addition to the two already locked in debate. If we weren't making progress in adjudicating between the two, adding a third (in this case, in particular, highly abstract and idealized) one hardly seems helpful.
- Regarding the epistemic challenge, how can "objective" science discover that there are no races, if the concept of "race" is part of an ideology whose content adjusts to maintain power relations, and if ideology makes real what it purports simply to describe? At best, science will continually be playing "catch up" to refute the latest adjustment of "common sense."

One strategy to address these concerns is to resist the suggestion that the social critic is engaging in a special sort of "scientific" or "philosophical" inquiry that is inaccessible to or at odds with everyday practices of inquiry. Broadly, the point is to embed the theorist in the social context and construe ideology critique as "immanent" that is, critique reveals contradictions or pragmatic paradoxes within the ideology (Jaeggi 2009; Stahl 2014).[4] To my mind, the most compelling articulation of this broad strategy is offered by Robin Celikates. On his view, ideology critique is itself a social practice continuous with our everyday efforts to achieve reflective endorsement of our ongoing practices: "The critique of ideology can . . . be reformulated as a specific case of the practice of critique without presupposing a privileged epistemic position and a break with ordinary practices of justification" (Celikates 2006, 35). He suggests:

> [I]he attempt to show that particular interests stand behind a moral position that presents itself as universal, that an agent was lured into a moral judgment by arranged evidence, or that under certain social conditions someone was unable to come to the "right" insight, is part of the practice of morality. It becomes ineffective if voiced as a generalized suspicion from a standpoint that locates itself outside of this practice. (Celikates 2006, 33)

As Celikates sees it, science and philosophy are not authoritative discourses that dictate what moral position we should accept, but are resources

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[4] It is a useful question to consider whether, and if so, how, a method of reflective equilibrium fits with this model of immanent critique. Thanks to an anonymous referee for alerting me to this connection.

to be drawn on in ordinary social contestation over issues of justice. (See also Shelby 2014, 63.)

3 Against Ideology as Shared Beliefs

I agree with much of this picture. However, I am worried that the model of reasoned public dialogue (even supported by the media) is not always sufficient to disrupt ideology, and not simply because the media won't cooperate. There are two connected concerns. First, ideologies don't just consist of shared beliefs, or shared "cognitive defects." This can be seen more clearly once we attend to a particular role of ideology as a *source* of beliefs. Second, an epistemic critique of ideology can't just be a matter of pointing out that a belief (or set of beliefs) lack rational credentials, because ideology is part of what gives people their tools of reasoning in the first place. I will discuss the first concern in (section 3) and turn to the second concern in section 4. Although my explicit target is the cognitivist approach to ideology, along the way I am attempting to expose and challenge a kind of explanatory individualism that dominates discussion in social ontology. (See also Epstein 2015.) The issue of individualism will become more apparent in section 5. On the approach I favor, ideology is not primarily a psychological phenomenon, but is also a cultural one; therefore, a change of culture, and not just a change of individual attitudes, is required to achieve social justice.

Cognitivism situates ideology in shared (false) beliefs and shared (invalid) patterns of thought. But belief and thought are themselves products of psychological processes involving perception, attention, memory, and the like. Plausibly ideology plays a role in framing our experience of the world and possibilities for action in a way that involves beliefs, but is better understood if we include sub-doxastic mechanisms and processes (Balkin 1998). These psychological processes are learned through socialization. To become a participant in the social domain, one must learn how to differentiate signal from noise in order to communicate and coordinate. To become a fluent participant, this differentiation must occur spontaneously, "unthinkingly." But what counts as a signal is not simply a matter of what's in my head, or yours, but also depends on what we must attend to in order for our practices to produce and distribute things of value. Signals depend on information encoded in material things, relations, and processes. So it is helpful to begin with social practices and situate ideology as serving a social function, and not simply located within individual minds.

Let's begin with the cognitivist suggestion that ideology is constituted by shared beliefs. The aptness of cognitivism begins to look shaky in Shelby's own characterization of ideology:

> [I]deologies are not, generally, attributed to individuals
> but to social groups, whole societies, or historical eras.

> These are those commonly held beliefs and implicit judg-
> ments that legitimate stratified social orders or imperial
> projects. . . . Indeed, the locus of ideology is common
> sense, that reservoir of background assumptions that agents
> draw on spontaneously as they engage in social intercourse.
> (2014, 67)

In defining ideology in terms of shared beliefs, cognitivism seems to be
committed to the idea that the content of the ideology is determined by
the attitudes of the majority; ideology is just what most people believe, or
believe together.[5] But how do we identify the relevant ideological beliefs?
Consider an oligarchy. Suppose the ruling elite is invested in an explicit
ideology and structures the society to embody it; the masses may then
enact it, but on the basis of a completely different set of beliefs or even
multiple divergent sets of beliefs. This isn't just an obscure hypothetical.
It is plausible that there are many different sets of beliefs, popular among
different groups, that undergird contemporary racism in the United States.
It is also plausible that implicit racist bias is not best characterized in terms
of beliefs or judgments (Machery 2016; Madva 2016; Gendler 2008).

Moreover, as Shelby suggests in the latter part of the quote, what people
believe *derives from* the ideology that dominates their social context. He
points out, "Individuals now absorb, through processes of socialization
and mass media, the attitudes and habits of mind that are constitutive of
racial ideology" (71).[6] Ideology, recall, is intended to function as an answer
to the *explanatory* question: What explains persistent racial injustice? The
cognitivist answers: racist ideology. If racist ideology is nothing more than
a set of shared racist beliefs, this just pushes the question back: What
explains the presence and persistence of such racist beliefs?[7] It would
seem that explanatory work is being done by the idea that we (collectively)

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[5] Though he says, "the theory of ideology is not concerned with the mental life of individuals
per se but with those beliefs that are widely shared and known to be so. Thus ideologies
are essentially forms of *social* thought" (Shelby 2003, 158). I suspect that a source of our
disagreement is in what it means for thought to be *social*. I don't think it is a matter of
shared intentionality, or even common knowledge, though shared intentionality and common
knowledge are important for some forms of social life.
[6] Also, "The relevant beliefs play a role in *mediating* social interaction; they are part of the
'life-world' or 'common meanings' through which social actors live their lives and coordinate
their actions. Racist beliefs, as we know, have engendered a complex and sometimes subtle
ensemble of social symbols, codes, norms and expectations; and these structure social conduct
between and within the so-called races" (Shelby 2003, 159–160). It is interesting here that
beliefs are taken to be "prior" to the symbols, codes, etc. My argument is questioning the
priority and suggests there is an interdependence.
[7] Note that the problem is compounded if we ask: Which beliefs are the racist ones? One
cognitivist answer is: the ones that function to perpetuate racial injustice. But how do we
explain the persistence of racial injustice? It is due to a set of beliefs that function to produce
or sustain racial injustice. As it stands, this is unsatisfying, but other options are available and
will be discussed below.

"absorb" an ideology through socialization (etc.). What is it that we absorb, and how do we absorb it?

There are many ways to elaborate the sorts of "attitudes and habits of mind" that make up an ideology. (Cf. Alcoff 2006, 94–102 on "horizon"; Medina 2013 and Gatens 1996 on "social imaginaries.") The cognitivist takes belief to be central to racial ideology: we absorb beliefs. As Shelby (2003) states, "Its most fundamental illusion, the linchpin of the whole system of thought, is arguably the belief that 'races' exist at all" (168). Admittedly, however, problematic habits of mind are also part of the story:

> There are many types of cognitive error that are typical of ideological thinking—inconsistency, oversimplification, exaggeration, half-truth, equivocation, circularity, neglect of pertinent facts, false dichotomy, obfuscation, misuse of "authoritative" sources, hasty generalization, and so forth. (Shelby 2003, 166)

Even so, on the cognitivist account it remains the individual's thinking or reasoning that is in error, not the very tools that our language and culture provide us in order to think.[8] But what we absorb through socialization is not just a set of beliefs, but a language, a set of concepts, a responsiveness to particular features of things (and not others), a set of social meanings. The cognitivist emphasis on shared beliefs and patterns of reasoning is too limited to accommodate all this.

Standard models for understanding "a set of shared beliefs," held, say, by Smith and Jones (et al.) would suggest simply that either their beliefs simply have the same content, or they have common belief that they have beliefs with the same content. There are several ways this falls short.

(a) In the case of ideology, it isn't just a "matter of chance" that Smith and Jones (et al.) share their (ideological) beliefs. Note, however, that because their ideological beliefs are false or distorted, we can't explain their convergence by reference to the truth. What explains why we are so systematically and enduringly mistaken?

(b) Unless we characterize the beliefs in *very* thin terms, it is implausible that an ideology is so specific to manifest itself in the same beliefs in the members of the culture. Plausibly, even both sides of a disagreement may be ideological—for example, someone claiming that a particular action is *chaste*, *slutty,* or *ghetto*, and one denying it, are both in the grip of an ideology.[9] It is more plausible to think

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[8] Note also that Shelby (2003) suggests that ideologies are sets of beliefs held with false consciousness; therefore, the same set of beliefs held by one person may not be ideological, but when held by another might well be. This requires an individualistic approach: whether a set of beliefs is ideological is partly a matter of content, partly a matter of social function/effects, and partly a matter of how the individual(s) in question hold(s) them. He seems to drop the last condition in (2014).

[9] Thanks to Stephen Yablo for pointing this out.

that the very concepts of *chaste*, *slutty*, and *ghetto* are among the things ideology provides.

(c) An account of ideology needs to explain what it is for the ideology to be *public* and a *source* of "shared beliefs" rather than simply constituted by them. Although beliefs can be a source of other beliefs, the compositional structure of propositions suggests that there is more to be said. Consider a language. Although it is true that if 'dog' means *dog* in English, then English speakers will believe that 'dog' means *dog*, so there is a set of shared beliefs. However, the explanation of *why* 'dog' means *dog* can't simply be that English speakers have that belief. (Mustn't 'dog' already mean *dog* in order for us to truly believe it? Such semantic beliefs don't emerge ex nihilo.) The explanation of how language conventions evolve (plausibly including a story about solving coordination problems) is going to be a matter of developing linguistic *practices*.

(d) Racial injustice (and other forms of injustice) persists despite substantial changes in "common sense" or shared belief; the justification of practices can evolve over time with little change in the pattern of behavior. Moreover, different individuals can engage in shared practices on the basis of very different understandings of what they are doing and why. This suggests that the role of belief in coordination may not be as central as sometimes assumed.

Why might this matter? I grant that social movements need to refute false beliefs and challenge the inferences, reasons, etc., that people offer for their unjust behavior or policies. My point is not to *replace* reasoned debate with something else. However, another crucial dimension of ideology critique is a disruption of the very terms and concepts we use to understand the world (think of consciousness raising [MacKinnon 1989, ch. 5]). This disruption challenges us not by offering reasons, nor by rational discussion, but by queering our language, playing with meanings, and monkey-wrenching or otherwise shifting the material conditions that support our tutored dispositions. Effective social movements force our everyday concepts to break down and demonstrate how they fail to serve as adequate tools to get along in the world. Critique does not simply rely on standard epistemic challenges derived from science or logic. What's often needed are new experiences that highlight aspects of reality that were previously masked or obscured. (See Tilly 1998; Anderson 2014.)[10]

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[10] It is not entirely clear how the cognitivist wants to accommodate the role of new experience, especially experience that does not fit easily within the dominant cultural framework. Shelby sometimes suggests that science provides the empirical basis for disrupting ideology and philosophy criticizes the ideology's moral claims. But what if we gain moral knowledge through experience, but not through scientific inquiry? And what if experience provides non-propositional or non-doxastic resources for challenging ideology? I think that cognitivists (including Shelby) may differ on these questions. My main point here is to challenge the

There are many different ways this can occur. To begin, it is important that ideology is not, for the most part, thoroughly *hegemonic;* it does not exhaustively manage all thought and action. Individuals grow up, study, work, play, and live in different contexts that rely on different social practices. These practices involve different presuppositions, modes of interaction, and conceptual repertoires. Not all of them are consistent (Sewell 2005, 52–58). For example, women who work both inside and outside the home often recognize that the expectations and modes of interaction in these two contexts are quite different; in other words, there is a different culture at work than at home, and although these cultures organize gender in similar ways, there are important differences. In light of this, women often notice how changes both at home and at work could make each milieu better, such as more flexible scheduling at work and more fair and explicit divisions of labor at home. Modifications to workplace policies can help once the value of an alternative is recognized, but policy is not always able to cut through culture. However, the fragmentation of social life and the inevitability of occupying multiple social roles provides opportunities for leveraging insights from one practice to critique another or for subtly shifting practices and norms.

We should not relinquish a commitment to non-violence and rational discourse, but there are multiple ways to gain knowledge of social reality and the normative demands of justice, including *experience.* It is hard to have radically new experiences, because ideology manages and filters experience for us. A crucial step in disrupting ideology is to create experiential breaks that allow for (and often depend on) the creation of new and potentially emancipatory concepts and other tools for thinking, feeling, and acting. Subaltern counter-publics provide crucial spaces for exploring new ways of living together (Felski 1989; Fraser 1990); these can constitute experiments in living that create new (sub-)cultures and justify demands for broad structural change (Anderson 1991, 2014; Fine 1998; Pappas 2016). Social change typically requires forms of critique that the cognitivist model can't easily accommodate—either practically or evidentially—with its narrow focus on certain understandings of scientific inquiry, moral theory, and public debate.[11]

4 Ideology, Reasons, and Practices

A second, and perhaps more substantial, concern with cognitivism is that our ability to critique beliefs and patterns of thought by providing reasons is itself a learned skill that depends on our social milieu (Laden 2012). What

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idea that our only option is to rely on reasoned debate to gain moral knowledge and critique ideology.

[11] Science and moral theory are both more practice-based and value-laden than is sometimes acknowledged. If one adopts a more pragmatist view of both, then the projects of science, moral theory, and politics are more continuous. (See, e.g., Anderson 1995).

counts as a good reason for something isn't just a matter of what deductive arguments are, in principle, available. We think and act as participants in practices.

Consider the practice of promising (Rawls 1955). As participants in the practice of promising, individuals commit themselves to forego calculations of individual self-interest (and other considerations) when the time comes to make good on the promise. Suppose you promise to take your friend to the airport on an early Sunday morning. Sunday morning comes and you are exhausted and would prefer to stay in bed and have a leisurely brunch later in the day. If you are good at promising, if you have been socialized properly, you get yourself up and take your friend to the airport. Within the practice of promising, the fact that you are tired is not sufficient reason to break your promise. If you have been *very well* socialized in the moral community, your disposition to break the promise may be hardly noticeable. Eventually you might not even want to do anything other than keep your promise. This is a paradigm case of an adaptation of *desire* to a social practice, but success in the practice of promising also requires dispositions attend to certain facts and not others, certain reasons and not others.

The same is true of other forms of reasoning. In academia, what questions we ask, what concepts and terminology we employ, what standards of evidence we hold ourselves and others to, what forms of argument are accepted, and what methods are deemed acceptable depend on what discipline we are part of. Disciplines are a set of practices that structure our thinking and interaction. Beyond academia, different professions, trades, religions, associations, and communities depend on their own epistemic and practical forms of disciplined action. To be disciplined is not necessarily to follow a rule. It is to develop ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, and responding to relevant phenomena in coordination with others (Zawidzki 2013). Of course, there are better and worse ways to do this. So we have normative inquiry about what counts as a good reason, and this extends well beyond deductive logic.

Practices, in the normal case, orient us collectively toward, produce, and distribute access to resources (usually material things that are taken to have value). Culture defines the terms of coordination for a group. William Sewell captures the idea: "Culture may be thought of as a network of semiotic relations cast across society, a network with a different shape and different spatiality than institutional, or economic, or political networks" (Sewell 2005, 49). He continues:

> This implies that users of culture will form a semiotic community—in the sense that they will recognize the same set of oppositions and therefore be capable of engaging in mutually meaningful symbolic action. To use the ubiquitous linguistic analogy, they will be capable of using the

> "grammar" of the semiotic system to make understandable "utterances." (49)

For example, an ear of corn can be viewed as something to eat, or as a commodity to be sold, as a religious symbol. In other words, we can apply different schemas to the object, and the schemas frame our consciousness of and practical orientation toward the object. The cultural schemas must be public in order to make coordination possible. The different schemas not only offer modes of interpretation; they license different ways of interacting with the corn. Actions based on these different schemas have an effect on the ear of corn; for example, it might be cooked for food, or the kernels removed to be shipped, or dried and hung in a prominent place to be worshipped. The effects of our actions then influence the schema. If American agri-business offers a high price for the corn, and the community needs cash, the farmer may sell the crop to be converted to ethanol. In turn, this may change the meaning of corn—what it is "for" and how it is grown. Thus, culture and material resources constitute are embedded in a loop, where each affects the other.

When we "absorb through socialization . . . attitudes and habits of mind," we are becoming participants in a practice. Rawls (1955) argues that practices are logically prior to the behavior and states of mind of the participants; they provide a "stage setting" for action (Rawls 1955, 25); they render our action meaningful; they constitute reasons for action. For example, Akna performs a ritual with maize *because* this is a way to worship. The practice constitutes her reason. It may also be that she believes that performing the ritual will have good effects and others will respect her if she does. But even if these beliefs are false, she has reason to perform the ritual because this is what the practice requires. Moreover, Akna's performance of the ritual may be, in some sense, "unthinking." She does it because *this is what one does*; this action may be constitutive of her role, her identity, who she is.

Attempting to change individuals who are socialized into a practice by engaging in debate about their actions is not just (typically) futile; it rests on a confusion about the nature of social agency. Insofar as my action is called for by a practice, the pros and cons of this particular choice to act are set aside (think of promising). And because we are typically fluent, "unthinking," in the social practices of our milieu, debate over the reasons for the practice tend to be otiose. Ideology involves individual attitudes, but what is missing from the cognitivist account is how these attitudes are connected to our unthinking responses, our bodily comportment, the social and material realities that constitute our milieu.

Of course, those who adopt "high ground" critique will sometimes offer reasons to change our practices as a whole, and invite us to think differently about them. This can be helpful, especially when engaging with elites (e.g., lawyers, legislators, policy makers) who can put pressure on the practices

and provide incentives for change (Lessig 1995). However, institutional change without cultural change is a mixed bag, for practices depend on our ability to coordinate using shared meanings.

What does it mean to say that the practice is "logically prior" to the behavior and states of mind of the participants? Rawls (1955) suggests:

> In the case of actions specified by practices it is logically impossible to perform them outside the stage-setting provided by those practices, for unless there is the practice, and unless the requisite proprieties are fulfilled, whatever one does, whatever movements one makes, will fail to count as a form of action which the practice specifies. (25)

So, for example, one cannot take communion just by drinking some wine and eating some unleavened bread. Religious practices are highly institutionalized and ritualized. However, practices can be more or less explicit, transparent, rule-governed, or intentional. On the less explicit . . . intentional end, practices are certain regularities or patterns in behavior that are guided by shared schemas acquired through primitive forms of social mentality (including cognition, affect, experience)—that is, thinking and feeling that has been shaped by contact with others who are tacitly taken to have goals and to pursue them.[12] Infants engage with adults, non-human animals engage with each other, and humans engage with non-human animals in social practices (Gruen 2014). On the rationalistic end of the spectrum, the patterns in behavior are guided by highly sophisticated forms of social cognition and intentional agency—these capacities enable us to formulate rules and play games as well as write constitutions—but this depends on the more basic shaping of interaction (McGeer 2007; Zawidzki 2013). This suggests that anything we might reasonably count as social agency (or agency *tout court*?) takes place within a domain structured by semiotic relations and material conditions (i.e., within practices, broadly construed).

This is not to say, however, that meanings are determined by the majority, or even those in authority, such as doctors who are experts on arthritis (Burge 1979), or chemists on water (Kripke 1980). Meanings emerge and evolve in the semiotic net as our practices engage the world.

> What things in the world *are* is never fully determined by the symbolic net we throw over them—this also depends on their preexisting physical characteristics, the spatial relations in which they occur, the relations of power with

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[12] Following Zawidzki (2013), I assume that for this it is sufficient to take what he calls an "enhanced teleological stance" (which is a version of Dennett's intentional stance), and does not require "mindreading," but only an ability to read behavior as directed. (Even dogs can tell if they are kicked intentionally or not, without ascribing full-blown beliefs that is, propositional attitudes that represent the world through a distinctive mode of presentation, to the kicker.) See also Haslanger Forthcoming, ch. 2.

> which they are invested, their economic value, and, of
> course, the different symbolic meanings that may have
> been attributed to them by other actors. The world is recal-
> citrant to our predications of meaning. Hence, as Marshall
> Sahlins has pointed out, every act of symbolic attribution
> puts the symbols at risk, makes it possible that the mean-
> ings of the symbols will be inflected or transformed by the
> uncertain consequences of practice. (Sewell 2005, 51)

For example, what counts as "food" is culturally variable, but we can't count just anything as food. And once we count ketchup as a vegetable, our notion of vegetable begins to lose its bearings, even when applied to other things. If ketchup is a vegetable, then surely salsa must be. What about barbeque sauce? Or, given that tomatoes are biologically categorized as a fruit, what about strawberry jam? If the public schools, through their lunch programs, teach children that ketchup, barbeque sauce, and strawberry jam are vegetables, then will these eventually squeeze beets and brussels sprouts out of the category?

How do practices change? It is difficult for an individual to change a practice. Although one may refuse to participate or find ways to disrupt a performance on a particular occasion, individual "rule-breakers" are easily disregarded and are often punished. One-on-one engagement with others committed to the practice can make a difference, such as inviting a White businessman from the suburbs to have dinner in a housing project, or to commute together on the bus, can have a lasting effect on the individual. And we can hope for some amount of change to occur one person at a time. But broad social change requires change on multiple levels: change to agents, change to culture, and change to structures, policies, and laws. Argumentation and public debate can be useful, but there is a risk that it will only move us along tracks that the ideology has set down. I suggested in the previous section that social movements can promote change by providing disruptive experiences that force a shift in our collective conceptual repertoire. Another strategy is to challenge everyday practices in public and systematic ways, to bring them to the surface so they might be critically evaluated. Yet another is to bring about changes in the material conditions that sustain the practices. These modes of social change are, I suggest, revolutionary rather than revisionary, because they are not (usually) a matter of reasoned engagement with one's opposition. Yet they need not be violent.

I have argued (section 3) that ideology is not best understood as a set of shared beliefs or other cognitive states, but should be extended to include the "concepts and languages of practical thought" (Hall 1996 [2006], 24)—that is, the tools culture provides us to think and act in coordination. (See also Balkin 1998.) I've also argued (section 4) that we should adopt a "practice-first" approach to these tools; ideologies are not a set of beliefs or other psychological states, but are instead a public

"network of semiotic relations" that, together with the material conditions, structure our practices and provide the architecture for agency (Sewell 1992; Haslanger 2012, ch.15).   Ideologies, however, are not just any network of semiotic relations, for as Shelby argues and I agree, they function to sustain unjust social relations. I have argued elsewhere that social structures are constituted by an interconnected web of practices (Haslanger 2016). The web of practices relies on this network of semiotic relations, what I've called the cultural technē (Haslanger Forthcoming). Some technēs, we might hope, sustain good and just forms of coordination. Ideologies, however, are technēs that produce or sustain injustice by guiding us to enact unjust practices. If racism is an ideology, in this sense, then it partly constitutes social practices that give people reason to act in racist ways. The practices in question may also constitute roles and identities and explain individual behavior.

5 Racism and Racial Formations

The account of ideology just sketched focuses on ideology as a set of cultural tools that shape the practical orientations in a group. Although an individual's practical orientation can include propositional attitudes, it also includes psychological mechanisms—cognitive, conative, perceptual, agentic—that sort, shape, and filter what can be the objects of our attitudes. In addition to practical orientations, however, groups also produce explicit ideology.[13] Explicit ideology is both an expression and rationalization of a cultural technē. Religion is taken to be a paradigm example in Marx (Marx 1843–1844). On the whole, explicit ideologies, as rationalizations of our unjust practices, are systematically false—or at least distorting; they attempt to present our practices in ways that obscure or mystify them and their consequences. But such rationalizations are not an essential part of what enables or motivates the practice, and that's why a critique of such rationalizations is so often ineffective in promoting social change.

Given the "practice first" account of ideology I've just sketched, I recommend we think of racism not as an ideology, but as an *ideological formation*. An ideology is a cultural technē—the web of meanings, symbols, scripts, and such—that functions to create or stabilize unjust social relations. The unjust practices, institutions, behavior, and other artifacts guided or formed by an ideology are ideological formations. Racism, on my view, is constituted by an interconnected web of unjust social *practices* that unjustly disadvantage certain groups, such as residential segregation, police brutality,

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[13] Some distinguish practical consciousness from ideology, identifying ideology with an explicit formulation of practical consciousness. This is in keeping with a central use of the term "ideology," but does not serve my purposes well, for there are many ideological schemas that govern social life that aren't articulated and would be hard to articulate uncontroversially. Moreover, what's centrally at issue in explaining our participation in unjust structures is our default responsiveness to the social world, rather than our attempts to rationalize it.

biased hiring and wage inequity, and educational disadvantage. These are not random practices, but are connected by a racist technē. But due to the looping effects that connect agents, meanings, and material conditions, the racist technē is both a product and a source of racism.

Why worry about the difference between ideologies and ideological formations? The choice to focus on practices and structures is relevant to the explanatory question. Remember, we began with the project of describing persistent racial inequality or racial injustice as a social phenomenon and sought an explanation. What explains enduring racial inequality or injustice? I don't think the best answer is simply ideology. Practices are what distribute things of value and disvalue: toxic waste is dumped in poor Black neighborhoods, and good schools are built in the White suburbs. Of course, these practices are not arbitrary; there is no surprise where the good stuff ends up. But the distribution of goods doesn't end up how it does because of what most people believe, for it is just as true that individuals share racist beliefs because they live in a world in which certain groups get the good stuff. We learn about race and what different races "deserve" by looking around us.

This suggests that racial inequality is a systematic phenomenon best understood in terms of dynamic homeostasis (Mallon 2003; Boyd 1999). There are multiple determinants of social stratification in a society: wealth, status, prestige, power, authority, autonomy, opportunity, to name a few. In a stratified society, there are mechanisms that stably position groups hierarchically along these dimensions. Homeostasis explains the persistence of hierarchy: changes in part of the system are adjusted for elsewhere so that the status quo is maintained. But the system is dynamic; although relatively stable, there is a historical development; the adjustments don't always return the system exactly to the original state, but can allow a shift to a different sort of hierarchical structure.[14] For example, in the case of African Americans, slavery evolved into Jim Crow segregation, which evolved into the current hierarchy maintained by mass incarceration and felonization, ghettoization, economic marginalization, and cultural stigma.[15]

In the terms I've suggested, systematic racial injustice is explained by the systematic looping of schemas and resources that occurs in practices and the structures they form. Practices are guided by ideology—that is, a racist cultural technē. But the ideology is not an independent causal factor; this is why it is defined functionally. There are times when it is important to single out ideology, beliefs, or emotional states as a significant factor in

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[14] Theodore Bach (2012) explores the use of historical essences to provide an account of gender; some of his tools are also valuable in considering race.

[15] Charles Mills (1997) uses the notion of a contract to explicate the systematic nature of racism over time. On my view, Mills' postulation of a contract is best understood as a device for capturing the sense in which racism is system that functions *as if it were* designed, even if it was the result of complex and contingent historical events.

response to certain questions (Blum 2002; Garcia 1996; cf. Mills 2003 and Shelby 2002). But to focus entirely on the ideology would be tantamount to explaining why the temperature of the room remains constant by simply pointing to the fact that the thermostat is set at 68°F. The workings of the thermostat and the heating and cooling system are crucial to understanding the phenomenon of stable temperature, just as the process by which cultural technēs are formed, performed, and reinscribed through their impact on the material conditions explains social stability and evolution.

Note that on my view, we can attend to a particular racist practice guided by a particular schema, such as an employment practice at a particular company or within an industry, or consider racism more broadly as a structure guided by a broad cultural technē involving "color" stigma across domains. However, it is important to note that a practice that may be unjust when embedded in a certain structure, or under certain material conditions, may not be unjust in other contexts.[16] For example, suppose that a city has raised funds to build six municipal swimming pools. One might think that the fair procedure would be to distribute the swimming pools geographically so that they are equally spaced throughout the city; such a decision would seem to be guided by an egalitarian ethos. However, suppose that the city's population is concentrated in the southeast corner where tall housing projects surrounded by cement are occupied by individuals in poverty, and the majority of the northern part of the city is occupied by wealthy individuals in single family homes, many of which have large yards and their own private swimming pools. Clearly it the fairer decision would be to build more swimming pools, or spend more of the swimming pool budget for larger or more accommodating facilities, in the southeast. What this shows is that often a schema cannot be evaluated in isolation; the practice it guides must be considered as part of a broader structure or set of structures in order to gauge its impact. Some schemas, however, are more amenable to being evaluated in isolation, such as those schemas that render women walking alone at night rapeable.

6 Challenges Redux

I have argued that we should understand ideologies in terms of the concepts, rules, norms, stereotypes, scripts, and the like that partly constitute a practice. Ideology critique, then, can involve epistemic challenges to beliefs, but also must include challenges to the concepts and other framing devices that create meaning, and more generally to the practice as a whole.

With this revised conception of ideology and ideology critique, we can begin to address the challenges we considered before. Recall briefly:

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[16] Thanks to Kenny Easwaran for helping me to appreciate this point and Roger White for the example.

- *Normative challenge:* in debates with another who fundamentally disagrees on moral/political issues, one's moral criticism can draw on one's own moral/political framework, in which case it is not likely to be convincing, or one can draw on the other's moral/political framework, in which case it is unlikely to recommend the changes one hopes for.
- *Epistemic challenge:* to unmask the illusions of those who endorse a hegemonic understanding of reality one cannot simply point to "the facts," because hegemony functions to constitute the facts that render it legitimate. But if one's own approach is not supported by "the facts," then what does support it? Wishful thinking?

Regarding the normative challenge, we have seen that ideology critique is not all about moral/political debate, but about making experiences possible that challenge "common sense" and force conceptual change. However, the project of normative critique is not best undertaken a priori, but in collaboration with those who have situated knowledge of the injustices in question (Haslanger Forthcoming, ch. 2). There is no guarantee that such disruption will yield more apt concepts or more just practices; whether it does so or not depends on the particular movement and the historical circumstances.

Regarding the epistemic challenge, ideology critique, in the sense I've sketched, challenges not only the truth/falsity of our beliefs about "the facts," but also the terms used to describe the facts. For example, redescribing meat as the flesh of tortured animals, or racial profiling as racial targeting, matters. Hegemony both creates a world and a way of seeing a world, but the world created can be seen in different ways. This is part of what ideology critique offers.

More generally, on the account I've sketched, reasoned debate is a good thing, but we should not, even as philosophers, let reasoned debate absorb all our energy. We also should promote other forms of cognitive, affective, and perceptual shifts, and undertake to shift the material conditions that undergird and reify racism. But the real lesson, I hope, is that social change requires changes in our practices. Although there are times when individuals have been powerfully influential in bringing about such change, typically it is because they have been part of a broader movement with whom they were allied. Rosa Parks was a woman of great courage, but she did not act alone.

> Because that arc (of the moral universe) doesn't bend on its own. It takes effort. It takes action. It takes speech after speech and march after march. It takes public pressure and public demonstration. It takes time and it takes energy. It takes a firm commitment by multitudes. The arc doesn't passively bend on its own. It must be bent. We all must bend it together. (Weigant 2013)

To change a social practice or a social structure we must work together, and until we do, the system of racism will continue to operate and justice will be only a dream.

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